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A DISTANT RELATIVE

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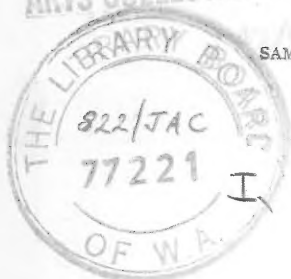
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MADE AND PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
BUTLER AND TANNER LTD, FROME AND LONDON
MADE IN ENGLAND

CHARACTERS

MR. GEORGE SPRIGGS (a Bricklayer, aged about 50).

MRS. SPRIGGS (his Wife).

ETHEL SPRIGGS (his Daughter).

MR. AUGUSTUS PRICE (Mrs. Spriggs's Brother, 40).

MR. ALFRED POTTER (engaged to Ethel).

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A DISTANT RELATIVE

SCENE.—MR. SPRIGGS's *Living-room*.

TIME.—*Evening*.

Old-fashioned window c., door opening on to street R.C., door up L. Fireplace L. Two easy-chairs by fireplace, table up C., small chairs, oleographs, vases on mantel-piece, etc. Small table in window, with plants; one or two old-fashioned pieces of furniture about the room.

(The stage is occupied by MR. and MRS. SPRIGGS. MR. SPRIGGS is standing up; MRS. SPRIGGS by fire, sewing.)

MR. SPRIGGS (*glaring at door L.*). How much longer are they going to be? They seem very fond of the kitchen.

MRS. SPRIGGS. It's only natural, George. Don't you remember when——

MR. SPRIGGS (*fumbling at collar*). No, I don't. All I know is that your poor father never 'ad to put on a collar for me; and, mind you, I won't wear one after they are married, not if you all went on your bended knees and asked me to. (*He takes the other easy-chair.*)

(Door L. opens and ETHEL and MR. POTTER enter and cross to door R. ETHEL opens door and stands holding it. MR. SPRIGGS shivers and then coughs.)

POTTER. Your father has got a cold.

ETHEL. Not him; it's too much smoking. He's smoking all day long.

MR. SPRIGGS (*coughing again*). It's a cold.

(ETHEL ignores him. She and POTTER are whispering

and scuffling. She pushes him out and he pushes in again. The door is enacting the part of a ventilating-fan. MR. SPRIGGS rises.)

MRS. SPRIGGS (*hastily*). It's only another fortnight, Father.

MR. SPRIGGS (*resuming his seat and speaking vindictively*). After they're spliced I'll go round and I'll play about with their front door——

(*ETHEL pushes MR. POTTER out and closes door on him with a violent bang. MR. SPRIGGS rises again.*)

ETHEL (*crossing to him*). What's the matter? What are you looking like that for?

MR. SPRIGGS (*feebly*). Too much draught—for your mother. I'm afraid of her asthma again.

ETHEL. You *are* thoughtful! Ta-ta! We shall be back soon. Mind you don't sit in a draught. And what about an antimacassar for your poor old shoulders?

(*Snatches one from a chair, throws it over him, gives him a pat on the head, and then runs to join MR. POTTER, who has opened the door again. They both exit.*)

MR. SPRIGGS (*feeling his head, proudly*). Anybody who can't be 'appy with her—don't deserve to be 'appy.

MRS. SPRIGGS (*nervously*). I wish it was over. She'll break her heart if anything happens to prevent it, and Gussie——

MR. SPRIGGS. A gal can't 'elp what her uncle does. If Alfred throws her over for that, he's no man.

MRS. SPRIGGS (*shaking her head*). Pride is his great fault.

MR. SPRIGGS. It's no good taking up troubles afore they come; and, if you do 'ave to take 'em up, chuck 'em down at once—see?

MRS. SPRIGGS. Yes, you try chucking Gussie down, and see what happens. I used to try it when we was children together; but if I had a ha'penny, Gussie always got it. And always did it as though he was doing me a favour. That's Gussie.

MR. SPRIGGS (*in a doleful voice*). Cheer up, old gal. It was lucky you and Ethel wasn't here when he came.

MRS. SPRIGGS. But he'll come again.

MR. SPRIGGS. Yes, but he'll come diff'rent. (*In a raspy voice.*) This arternoon he touched me for a tail-coat and fancy trousers, and a top-at. (*Groans.*) He made a favour of it; said he must do us credit.

MRS. SPRIGGS (*nodding*). That's Gussie. That's 'im all over.

MR. SPRIGGS. P'raps he won't come. I believe he'll be ashamed to show 'is face here, when 'e comes to think of it; but if he does, don't forget he 'as come back from Australia. I told 'im we 'ad always told Ethel that 'er uncle was in Australia. See? It'll make it nicer for 'im, too. You don't suppose 'e wants to boast of where he's been!

MRS. SPRIGGS. And suppose he comes while Alfred is here?

MR. SPRIGGS. Then I ses: "How 'ave you left 'em all in Australia?" and winks at 'im.

MRS. SPRIGGS. And suppose you aren't 'ere?

MR. SPRIGGS. Then you say it and wink at 'im. (*Hastily.*) No, I know you can't; you've been too well brought up. Still, you can try. Try now.

(MRS. SPRIGGS *contorts her face horribly, first one side and then the other.*)

MRS. SPRIGGS. I believe I did it then. It felt like it.

MR. SPRIGGS. No, don't try it. Wot a pity they let Gussie out. If they give a man ten years, why do they let 'im out afore he 'as done it? Where's the sense of it? Ticket-of-leave be jiggered! And if they do give a man a ticket, it ought to be pinned on to—on to his coat-tails.

(*Both turn and look at each other as a shuffling is heard outside door R.*)

MRS. SPRIGGS (*nervously putting her finger to her mouth*). Gussie!

MR. SPRIGGS. Don't take up troubles afore they come. Ha! It has come.

(MR. AUGUSTUS PRICE enters slowly R. and shuts the door with exaggerated care. He is dressed in a frock-coat too large for him, with large flower in buttonhole; fancy trousers, high stiff collar, a flaring necktie embellished with a scarfpin; shoes and white spats.)

MR. PRICE (in a weak, mournful voice). Emma!

MRS. SPRIGGS. Gussie!

MR. PRICE (gives her a stage embrace, pats her shoulder and, passing his coat-sleeve across his eyes, totters into a chair). Emma! I've come home to die. (Extends hand to SPRIGGS.)

MR. SPRIGGS (taking it reluctantly and, afterwards, wiping his hand on the seat of his trousers). What are you going to die of?

MR. PRICE. Broken 'art, George.

MRS. SPRIGGS (hopefully). Why, have you 'ad an accident?

MR. PRICE (reproachfully). No, I've had enough to bear, without accidents. My 'art is broken for want of fair-play and justice.

MR. SPRIGGS. Justice! Want o' justice! Why, how much more 'do you want? You 'ad ten years, didn't you?

(MR. PRICE groans.)

MRS. SPRIGGS (shaking her head). George!

MR. PRICE (closing his eyes). I shan't last the night. But don't take any trouble about me. I can die anywhere. The doorstep is good enough for me. (Assumes pious, resigned expression.) It's no colder than Christian charity. (Gets up and looks round with half-closed eyes.) Where is it? Where's the doorstep?

MR. SPRIGGS. I'm sorry we can't ask you to stay with us, Gussie, 'specially as you are so ill, but we haven't got a room.

MR. PRICE (moaning, and closing his eyes). I must die somewhere; I shan't last the night. The doorstep'll do.

MR. SPRIGGS. You can't die 'ere, Gussie. Ethel is going to be married in a fortnight, and if you died 'ere that would put it off.

MR. PRICE (*slowly opening his eyes*). I might last longer if I was took care of.

MRS. SPRIGGS. And, besides, Ethel don't know where you've been—she's going to marry a very particular young chap—in the grocery line—and, if he found it out, it might be awkward.

(MR. PRICE *groans*.)

MR. SPRIGGS. It took 'im some time to get over me being a bricklayer. . . . What he'd say to you—

MR. PRICE. Why can't he be given to understand I've been in Australia? Same as you told Ethel. Tell 'im anything you like—I don't mind.

MR. SPRIGGS (*clearing his throat*). But, you see, we told Ethel you was doing well out there, and, gal-like—and Alfred talking a lot about his relations—she, she's made the most of it.

MR. PRICE. It don't matter. You say what you like. I shan't interfere with you.

MRS. SPRIGGS. But you don't know anything about Australia; and Alfred's very sharp.

MR. PRICE (*haughtily*). I know *all* about it. Some of the library books they used to give us was about it. One time I almost made up my mind to go there. You wait till you hear me put it over to them.

MR. SPRIGGS. And what are you going to do for a living, now you're out?

MR. PRICE. Anything that happens to come along, George.

MR. SPRIGGS. 'Ave you got any money?

MR. PRICE (*facetiously*). I left it behind—in Australia.

MR. SPRIGGS (*sharply*). Getting better, ain't you? How's that broken 'art getting on?

MR. PRICE. It's going better under this nice waist-coat you gave me.

MR. SPRIGGS (*violently*). You're a low-down trickster, that's what you are. A disgrace to your family. You

never done any good and you never will do. You're the black sheep of the family.

MR. PRICE. Don't get excited. You're only wasting your breath. I'm trying to help you—that's all. I don't mind anybody knowing where I've been—I was innercent. If you will give way to sinful pride, you must pay for it.

MR. SPRIGGS. 'Ow much do you want?

MR. PRICE. Eh?

MR. SPRIGGS. Will you go away if I give you a quid?

MR. PRICE (*smiling affably*). Not much; I've got a better idea of the value of money than that. Besides, I want to see my dear niece, and see whether that young man's good enough for her.

MR. SPRIGGS. Two quid?

MR. PRICE (*shaking his head*). Sorry, George. I couldn't do it. In justice to myself I couldn't do it. You'll be feeling lonely when you lose Ethel, and I might stay on and keep you company.

(MR. and MRS. SPRIGGS exchange glances of consternation.

MR. PRICE fills his pipe from a paper on the mantelpiece and winks at himself in the glass as he adjusts his tie.)

A nice watch and chain and a little money in my pocket and I shall be the rich uncle from Australia to a T.

MR. SPRIGGS (*furiously*). You won't get any more out of me. I've spent every farthing I've got.

MR. PRICE. Except what's in the bank. It'll take you a day or two to get at it, I know. S'pose we say Saturday for the watch and chain? At present my watch is being mended. See? The sea voyage upset it. See?

(MR. SPRIGGS looks helplessly at his wife, who looks away.

He gazes in a fascinated fashion at MR. PRICE, who nods cheerfully in return.)

I'll go with you and help choose it. It'll save you trouble, if it don't save your pocket. (*He stands with his back to the fire, thrusts his hands in his pockets, spreads his legs apart and blows smoke towards the ceiling.*)

(Enter MR. POTTER and ETHEL R. ETHEL stands eyeing MR. PRICE.)

MRS. SPRIGGS. It's—it's your Uncle Gussie.

MR. SPRIGGS (*choking*). From Australia. Just come over.

ETHEL. O-oh!

(MR. PRICE removes his pipe and, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand, moves towards ETHEL and kisses her on the eyebrow.)

MR. PRICE. Well, well, well! How this takes me back! I thought it was your mother again, as I knew her years ago. Before she married and before I went to Australia. Prettiest girl in the town, she was, then—and, mind, I'm not saying she 'as altered much.

ETHEL. Uncle!

MR. PRICE. True, my dear.

MR. SPRIGGS (*turning to POTTER and speaking gruffly*). This is Mr. Alfred Potter. Him as is engaged to Ethel.

MR. PRICE (*shaking hands*). Pleased to know you, sir. Pleased to know you. It's a most extraordinary thing, but you are the living image of a young friend of mine, Jack Bates by name, who has just come in for forty thousand a year.

(MR. and MRS. SPRIGGS start slightly and eye each other.)

ETHEL (*daringly*). That's nearly as much as you're worth, Uncle, isn't it?

MR. PRICE (*shaking his head and pondering*). Rather more, my dear. Rather more.

(There is an impressive silence. MR. SPRIGGS, who is stooping to get a light from the fire, nearly falls into it.)

MR. PRICE (*looking around and shaking his head*). Money isn't everything; it won't give you 'appiness. It's not much good, except to give away. (*He gazes benevolently at MR. POTTER.*)

ETHEL. Fancy coming over without saying a word to anybody, and taking us all by surprise like this!

MR. PRICE (*simply*). I felt I must see you all once more before I died. Just a flying visit I meant it to be—here to-day and gone to-morrow—but your father and mother won't hear of my going back just yet.

ETHEL. I should think not.

MR. PRICE. When I talked of going, your father 'eld me down in my chair.

ETHEL. Quite right, too. Now, sit down, Uncle, and tell us all about Australia.

(MR. PRICE *seats himself*. *ETHEL and POTTER seat themselves, one each side of him*. MR. and MRS. SPRIGGS *sit a little apart*.)

MR. POTTER. It's a big place, sir, Australia.

MR. PRICE. E—normous. (*Shakes his head*.)

MR. POTTER (*wistfully*). Opportunities.

MR. PRICE (*pursing his lips*). To a smart young man, yes. But, mind you, he mustn't be afraid of work. If I'd been afraid of work, I shouldn't be where I am now.

MR. SPRIGGS (*forgetting himself*). Or where you 'ave been.

MR. PRICE. Oh, South Africa! . . . No, I shouldn't 'ave been there, neither. (*Turns and glares defiantly at MR. SPRIGGS*.)

(MRS. SPRIGGS *rises anxiously and nudges her husband*.)

MRS. SPRIGGS. Lor'! I'd nearly forgot. George, you promised to look at that kitchen stove for me. (*Hustles him out door L.*)

MR. PRICE (*genially*). Every man to his trade. Now I shouldn't know one end from the other.

ETHEL. Of course you wouldn't, Uncle. I don't suppose you've ever seen yours.

MR. PRICE. Can't say I have, my dear. It wouldn't do for me to go prying about in the kitchen. (*Grandly*.) The servants wouldn't like it. Very touchy in Australia, they are. Why, one of my butlers gave me notice because I asked him not to eat peppermint bull's-eyes when he was waiting at table.

ETHEL. Fancy!

MR. PRICE. It didn't look well—and it smelt worse.

ETHEL. I suppose you soon got another, Uncle ?

MR. PRICE. Yes, my money is good, and I've always found you can get anything you want if you pay for it. Besides, it isn't every butler that has five footmen to help him.

ETHEL. Five ? Why, what do they do ?

MR. PRICE (*shrugging his shoulders*). Well, I don't know as they do much, but they look well about the place. A man in my persition—

MR. POTTER (*nodding*). Of course.

MR. PRICE. As a matter of fact, I don't want six motor-cars ; still, it's no use having money if you don't spend it, is it ?

(MR. POTTER and ETHEL eye each other in amazement.)

ETHEL (*wistfully*). It must be wonderful to be so rich, Uncle.

MR. PRICE. Well, well, everybody has their choice. I made my money, and there's no reason why your young gentleman shouldn't make his.

MR. POTTER (*timidly*). Hard work, I suppose, sir ?

MR. PRICE. Ye-es.

MR. POTTER. And saving ?

MR. PRICE. Ye-es. All very good in its way, but the important thing to 'ave is brains !

MR. POTTER (*despondently*). Ah !

MR. PRICE. If you have brains, you use 'em. You might save for hundreds of years and not 'ave 'arf what I've got. The thing to do is to save a bit to begin with and then use the money to make more. But, if you haven't got any saved, you can't begin. (*Eyes them furtively.*)

ETHEL. Alfred's got a little, Uncle.

MR. PRICE (*fervently*). That's good. I hope it's a nice little sum.

MR. POTTER. With what I've saved, sir, and what an aunt left me, I've got two hundred and eighty pounds.

MR. PRICE (*starts and eyes him*). Well, well, that's a beginning. And what are you going to do with it ?

ETHEL. Alfred is going to stay on with Palmer &

May's for another year, and then we shall take a little business of our own.

MR. PRICE. Quite right, quite right. I like to see young people make their own way ; it's good for them. Still—h'mm !

ETHEL (*after a pause*). Yes, Uncle ?

MR. PRICE. Perhaps a little help, or a little advice, wouldn't hurt.

MR. POTTER. I'm sure it wouldn't, sir.

MR. PRICE. Well, if it was my money I should use it to make more with. When I was your age I 'ad saved about half what you've got and in five years I was worth twenty thousand pounds.

ETHEL.

MR. POTTER. } How ?

MR. PRICE (*smiling indulgently*). By careful but perfectly safe speculation. (*Eyes MR. POTTER.*) But I suppose your little bit is tied up ?

MR. POTTER (*eagerly*). No, sir. Some of it is on deposit in a Building Society, and the other is in the Savings Bank. I could get it all out in a few days.

(MR. PRICE *looks thoughtful*. MR. POTTER and ETHEL *eye him anxiously*.)

MR. PRICE (*slapping his leg and speaking very slowly*). Well, I've never done it before, but seeing as how it's my own niece—in the family, so to speak—— (*Pauses.*)

ETHEL. Yes, Uncle ?

MR. PRICE (*slowly and impressively*). If you like to draw the money out and let me invest it in one of my concerns for you, I don't think (*smiles benevolently*) you'd have cause to regret it.

ETHEL. Oh, Uncle !

MR. PRICE. If you're not worth, say, ten thousand in five years, you can call me anything you like. If you change your mind at any time, you can have the money back by asking for it, with interest.

(ETHEL and MR. POTTER *spring to their feet*. ETHEL *puts her hands on MR. PRICE'S shoulder and kisses his cheek* ; MR. POTTER *takes his outstretched hand*.)

(*Glancing at the kitchen door.*) And not a word of this to your father and mother, mind. If there's one thing I can't stand, it's thanks. It always makes me feel so foolish. If you like to tell him after I've gone back to Australia, you can. (*Pauses.*) His thanks won't hurt me then.

MR. POTTER. I can never thank you enough, sir. I'll start getting the money out to-morrow.

MR. PRICE (*warmly*). That's right. That's business! I can see you're going to get on. (*Looks at door L.*) H'sh! Not a word.

(*Enter Mr. and Mrs. SPRIGGS from door L.*)

MR. PRICE. Made a good job of it, George?

(*Mr. SPRIGGS grunts.*)

If not, you'd better let me give you a new one.

MR. SPRIGGS. When I want a new stove, I'll buy one. (*Turns to ETHEL.*) Wot was your uncle telling you to 'ush about?

ETHEL (*glancing at MESSRS. PRICE and POTTER*). Nothing.

MR. SPRIGGS (*loudly*). Wot was it?

ETHEL (*uneasily*). It's a secret.

MR. SPRIGGS. I won't 'ave no secrets in this house. (*Turns to Mr. POTTER.*) Wot was it?

MR. POTTER (*stiffly*). It's a little private business between me and Mr. Price.

MR. SPRIGGS (*stammering*). Bu-business! You—you haven't been lending 'im money, 'ave you?

ETHEL (*laughing scornfully*). Don't be silly, Father. What good would Alfred's little bit of money be to Uncle Gussie? If you must know, Alfred is drawing it out for Uncle to invest it for him.

MR. POTTER. In his own business.

MR. PRICE (*with a threatening glance at Mr. SPRIGGS*). In Australia.

MR. POTTER. And he didn't want his generosity to be known.

(*Mr. SPRIGGS chokes and looks helplessly at his wife. She presses her lips together and frowns at him.*)

MR. SPRIGGS (*turning to MR. POTTER*). I—I didn't know you had got your money handy.

MR. POTTER (*laughing*). I'll get it all right. You don't get a chance like this any day. It's like a fairy tale.

(MR. SPRIGGS *stands looking from one to the other. He swallows and clears his throat.*)

MR. SPRIGGS. I should go careful, Alfred, if I was you. Little and sure is my motto. Every little bit I could manage to put by I took care of.

ETHEL (*glancing fondly at MR. PRICE*). But you didn't have an Uncle Gussie!

MR. POTTER (*impatiently*). There's two ways of saving, Mr. Spriggs. There's your way and there's Mr. Price's way.

ETHEL. Hear, hear!

MR. POTTER. And look at him now.

(*All turn instinctively and look at MR. PRICE. He adopts a modest attitude.*)

MR. SPRIGGS (*hushily*). Have it your own way. Have it your own way.

MR. PRICE. And, now, what about drinking the young couple's health?

(ETHEL *produces bottles of beer and glasses. She fills them.*)

MR. PRICE (*holding up his glass*). The health of the young couple. My niece, Ethel, and Mr. Alfred Potter, one of the best and smartest young men I 'ave ever met. A credit to the old country.

(*He empties his glass. MRS. SPRIGGS sips at hers, nervously eyeing MR. SPRIGGS, who does not drink.*)

MR. PRICE (*pointing to glass*). George!

MR. SPRIGGS. I don't want any.

ETHEL. Father!

(*All stare at him.*)

MR. SPRIGGS. I don't want any, I tell you. I feel it might go the wrong way.

MR. PRICE (*softly*). Go the wrong way, George? Why, it ought to know the way by this time. (*Laughs.*)

ETHEL. Anything the matter, Father?

MR. SPRIGGS. Only the sight of your Uncle Gussie.

(*MRS. SPRIGGS makes a half-movement forward.*)

(*Recovering.*) So unexpected, I mean—to see 'is nice, honest face again. Gave me quite a shock. I don't want to drink. I just want to sit and look at him. I can't quite believe he is real.

MR. PRICE (*jovially*). Well, you can pinch me if you like, just to make sure. Not too 'ard, mind.

(*MR. SPRIGGS eyes him for a moment, then moves stealthily towards him. MR. PRICE, somewhat uneasy, edges away, followed up by MR. SPRIGGS, who, with a sudden movement, clutches him with his left hand and pinches vigorously with his right.*)

(*Calling out.*) Oh! Here! Stop it, d'ye hear—stop it! O-o-h! O-o-o-h! (*Limps away and, falling into a chair, rubs himself tenderly.*)

(*The others gaze in bewilderment.*)

ETHEL. Father!

MRS. SPRIGGS. George!

MR. POTTER (*solemnly*). You don't know your own strength, Mr. Spriggs.

MR. SPRIGGS. P-hh! I didn't 'urt 'im. (*Advances on MR. PRICE.*) I just took hold——

(*MR. PRICE jumps up and takes refuge behind the astonished*
ETHEL.)

ETHEL (*strenuously*). Father! What are you doing?

(*MR. SPRIGGS pulls up short. They are all staring at him in amazement. He sits down with his face in his hands.*)

MRS. SPRIGGS. George! What is the matter with you?

MR. SPRIGGS (*wildly*). Oh, I'm 'arf-crazy.

(*They all approach him, MR. PRICE keeping behind*
ETHEL.)

MRS. SPRIGGS (*nervously*). Don't be silly, George. What's the matter?

MR. SPRIGGS (*desperately*). Too—toothache. It's been coming on all the evening. (*Holds his jaw and rocks to and fro.*)

ETHEL. I thought he was acting funny.

MR. POTTER (*wisely*). Ha! When he pinched you, Mr. Price, he was in agony.

MR. PRICE (*sourly*). So was I.

ETHEL. Which tooth is it, Father?

MR. SPRIGGS. The bad one.

(*They all regard him.*)

MRS. SPRIGGS (*timidly*). P'raps you'd better get to bed, George.

MR. SPRIGGS. I'm not going to bed.

MR. POTTER. Have you tried holding whisky in your mouth? I've heard—

MR. PRICE (*gently*). He couldn't do it—it 'ud slip down. If you find me a pair of pincers, I'll take it out for him—with pleasure. I've often 'ad to do it in Australia. I took out six running, once.

ETHEL. Oh, Uncle!

MR. PRICE. That's nothing—nothing. I 'ad to take a man's leg off once. The doctor couldn't 'ardly believe his eyes when he saw it! He said it was a miracle.

MR. SPRIGGS (*face savagely contorted*). So it was.

MR. PRICE (*blandly*). Tooth still aching, George? Won't you let me 'ave a go at it? Open your mouth and shut your eyes and I'll have it out afore you can say Jack Robinson—or any other words you might 'ave a fancy for.

ETHEL. Do let him, Father.

(MR. SPRIGGS *stares at her.*)

MR. POTTER. I'm sure he won't hurt you!

(MR. SPRIGGS starts up with an inarticulate cry, snatches his hat from peg and goes to door R.)

MRS. SPRIGGS. George! Where are you going?

MR. SPRIGGS (*eyeing her wildly*). Damntist.

(Exit R.)

MR. PRICE. Poor George! Some people can't bear pain.

ETHEL. I thought he seemed strange—pinching people and all that. It's a shame you had to suffer, Uncle.

MR. PRICE (*nobly*). Better me than anybody else. I don't mind pain. I'm used to it. If pinching me done your father's tooth any good, he's welcome.

MR. POTTER (*much impressed*). You have a noble disposition, sir.

MR. PRICE. No, no. That's what you learn in Australia. Ah, I wish you could see it. P'raps—

ETHEL (*eagerly*). Perhaps what, Uncle?

MR. PRICE (*laughing*). Well, well, I was thinking, p'raps, that next time I come over the two of you might like to go back with me for a visit. I'm a bit lonely sometimes.

ETHEL (*clasping her hands*). Oh, Uncle! It sounds like a dream. Isn't he wonderful, Mother?

MRS. SPRIGGS (*slowly*). Yes. He was always wonderful. Sometimes I could 'ardly believe he was my brother. None of us could make him out.

ETHEL (*brightly*). There! There's a character for you, Uncle.

MR. POTTER. They must have been proud of you, Mr. Price. You must have been, Mrs. Spriggs.

MRS. SPRIGGS. Proud isn't the name for it. (*Turning to ETHEL*.) I hope your father is all right. When you and Alfred go you might keep a look out for him.

ETHEL. Yes, I expect he's walking up and down. I don't really think he's gone to a dentist. Much more likely to wait and give it a chance of going off. Come along, Alf. See you later, Uncle Gussie.

(ETHEL goes off L., and returns putting on hat and coat.)

MR. PRICE *assists and, shaking hands with MR. POTTER, sees them off R. He looks at MRS. SPRIGGS, who is looking at him, and with a jaunty air takes up a position with his back to the fireplace.*)

MRS. SPRIGGS. Are you going to steal that boy's money, Gussie?

MR. PRICE (*shocked*). Steal? No, I'm going to invest it for him. He oughtn't to 'ave money; he don't know 'ow to use it.

MRS. SPRIGGS. And what are we going to say to him when he finds he 'as lost it?

MR. PRICE. I don't know. P'raps he'll find fault with you for telling 'im lies about me and Australia. Why not tell 'im the truth now? And save 'im his two 'undred and eighty pounds.

(MRS. SPRIGGS *looks down and dabs her eyes with her pocket-handkerchief.*)

(*Shaking his head and smiling.*) Sinful pride, Emma, that's what it is. Sinful pride. Well, well! We all 'ave our faults. (*Turns to mantelpiece and, taking a match, lights his pipe.*) Even George (*puffs*)—too careful of money, that's his trouble. Still—it comes in handy sometimes. It'll be a pinch for 'im, getting that gold watch and chain for me. (*Stands with legs apart and blows out a cloud of smoke.*) I don't suppose 'e thought for a moment 'e was saving up for me. And young Potter didn't, neither. That's where brains come in. (*Crosses to table, fills glass and drinks.*) Ha! This is better than quod. Lord! I just came in the nick of time. (*Sinks into easy-chair with legs apart as MR. SPRIGGS enters R.*)

MR. PRICE. 'Ad it out, George?

MR. SPRIGGS. Eh? Oh, the tooth! No, I didn't 'ave the toothache, Gussie. It was the sight of your nasty, artful little face wot upset me. But it's all right now. (*Nods at wife, then dances one or two clumsy steps.*)

MR. PRICE (*sourly*). Come in for a fortune?

MR. SPRIGGS. No, I've just saved one. I wonder I didn't think of it myself.

MR. PRICE. Think of what?

MR. SPRIGGS. You'll soon know; and you've only got yourself to thank for it.

MRS. SPRIGGS (*trembling*). George!

MR. SPRIGGS. It's all right, old gal, I've got out of the difficulty. Nobody'll suffer but Gussie.

MR. PRICE (*sharply*). Ho?

MR. SPRIGGS (*brightly*). Just as I got outside the door I ran into Bill White, the policeman. Being a pal o' mine, I told 'im all about Gussie.

MR. PRICE (*leaping from his chair*). What?

MR. SPRIGGS. Acting under his advice, I told 'im that Augustus Price, ticket-of-leave man, was trying to obtain money under false pretences. I told 'im to tell the Inspector—as soon as he goes off duty.

MR. PRICE. You—you—

MR. SPRIGGS (*with much enjoyment*). The beauty o' that, as Bill says, is that Gussie'll 'ave to set out on 'is travels again. He'll have to go into hiding, because if they catch 'im, he'll 'ave to finish 'is time. And Bill says if he writes letters to any of us it'll only make it easier to find him. You'd better take the first train to Australia, Gussie.

MR. PRICE (*breathlessly*). What—what time does he go off duty?

MR. SPRIGGS (*glancing at clock*). About ten minutes. I reckon you've just got time.

(MR. PRICE *snatches up his hat, gives them a poisonous glance, opens door R., and after carefully looking out closes it noiselessly behind him.*)

MR. SPRIGGS (*to wife*). Remember: called away to Australia by special telegram. Couldn't wait to say good-bye.

MRS. SPRIGGS. Oh, George! Is Mr. White really going to tell the Inspector?

MR. SPRIGGS. I wonder?

CURTAIN.



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